

## ***Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process***

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At the beginning of this coordination study, more than once the question “But, what is there to coordinate?” was heard. Given that there are only two public transportation agencies for a region that exceeds a fifth of this nation’s states, that these agencies provide transportation to many of the region’s human service organizations, and that they do it on a lean budget, there is little wonder as to what prompts the question. In a nutshell, coordination has always been the approach in the Panhandle; and, like much that takes place in rural areas and small towns, much of it is grassroots.

The approach to the Panhandle’s coordination planning has been fairly straightforward. There is one committee overseeing the work of a hired consultant. The effort has not included a lot of committees and sub-committees hashing out details, but instead a single lead group that is small enough to be manageable, yet diverse enough to represent key constituencies. The Regional Transportation Advisory Group (RTAG) is the name of the committee charged with overseeing the completion of the plan. Given the region’s size, the structure and organization of the planning approach emphasized the need to maximize the time committee members spent in meetings, as travel is expensive and time-consuming.

#### ***Regional Transportation Advisory Group***

In addition to loosely organized, grassroots coordination efforts, there is a history of a more formalized approach that has its roots in the Panhandle Transportation Consortium. This is a committee that got its start about ten years ago and is the basis for the RTAG. Beyond the RTAG, there are no special committees or advisory groups. Organizations and businesses that may be affected by changes stemming from this coordination plan provided information and feedback, attended workshops and meetings, but did not take a formalized role in the RTAG.

The RTAG is a committee of 19 individuals charged with overseeing the completion of this study. Its members include:

### **Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process**

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- Three representatives from Texas Department of Transportation: The Panhandle region touches the Amarillo, Lubbock, and Childress TxDOT districts. Susan Stockett represents the Amarillo District. Lynn Castle represents the Lubbock District and Kim Butler represents the Childress District.
- Two representatives from the transit agencies: Judy Phelps, Director of Amarillo City Transit represents her department for the City of Amarillo and Gerald Payton, Director of Transportation for Panhandle Community Services, represents Panhandle Transit.
- Two representatives from other key transportation providers: Jim Chilcote is the transportation director for Jan Werner Transportation and Carl McMillan represents the Panhandle Independent Living Center.
- One representative from the Texas Workforce Commission: Johnny Smith represents the Panhandle Workforce Development Board.
- One representative from the Health and Human Services Commission: Cindy Vandiver, originally represented the HHSC. Ms. Vandiver was later replaced by Claudia Stanford due to a change in jobs.
- Five representatives that are locally elected government officials: Positions were filled by Judge Richard Peet from Gray County, Judge Vernon Cook from Roberts County, Judge Kari Campbell from Moore County, Judge Jay Mayden from Childress County, and Judge Harold Keeter from Swisher County.
- Two mobility-impaired individuals: Julie Curbo filled one of the positions and the second position remained vacant.
- One local citizen: Elaine King Miller filled the position for citizens utilizing public transportation in Amarillo.
- One representative from the Area Agency on Aging for the Panhandle: David Green, executive director of AAA, was later replaced by Melissa Carter due to a job change.

**Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process**

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- One representative from the Metropolitan Planning Organization: Phet Xoumphonphakdy.

**Work Plan**

The work plan for the study is outlined in the table below.

*Table 3.1: Panhandle Transportation Coordination Study Work Plan*

<b>Goal</b>	<b>Actions</b>
Research Current Conditions Timeframe: April to May 31	Create Transportation Coordination Survey Identify agencies and collect contact information Create and distribute hard-copy and web-based survey Place follow-up phone calls and site visits Send TTI survey to appropriate agencies
Perform Public Outreach Timeframe: June	Conduct 10 public meetings across the region
Identify Transit Gaps and Overlaps Timeframe: July - August	Analyze survey and public outreach results
Identify Strategies for Gaps & Overlaps Timeframe: September – October	Conduct workshops to identify likely strategies to address transit needs and approaches to addressing gaps and overlaps.
Create Action Plans Timeframe: October - November	Identify lead agencies, resources, and implementation schedules

**Outreach Process**

**Surveys**

Information was gathered using a multi-pronged approach. First, stakeholders in the Panhandle region were identified using the RTAG’s network of contacts and the United Way 2-1-1 Resource Directory. In all, 221 organizations were identified in the Panhandle region as either likely to provide or need transportation services. Types of organizations contacted include transit agencies, health and human service agencies, nonprofit organizations, senior citizen centers, county and city officials, for-profit and non-profit assisted living and nursing care centers and community organizations. See Appendix D: Panhandle Region Agency Contacts for the list of organizations identified.

### ***Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process***

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Initial stakeholder contact was made with an introductory letter from the RTAG accompanied by a short survey that was developed by the consultant team and based upon research conducted by the Transportation Cooperation Research Project (TCRP) and the Texas Transportation Institute (TTI). TTI is a political subdivision of the State of Texas that provides transportation, technical planning and engineering support services to the Texas Department of Transportation. The survey sought to establish the type of agency, service area, client type and size, transportation needs (including number, type, and scheduled trips and unmet trips), current method of meeting transportation needs, and general interest in coordination strategies. The survey was made available in hard-copy and on-line in order to encourage a higher response rate. The surveys, along with an introductory letter from the Regional Transportation Advisory Group, were mailed and emailed on Wednesday, April 26, 2006. To solicit more responses, a reminder postcard and email message was sent on Tuesday, May 16<sup>th</sup> to non-responsive agencies. Fifty-four responses (a 24% response rate) had been collected when short survey was closed on May 31<sup>st</sup>. See Appendix E: Panhandle Transportation Survey Results.

For those organizations that directly provide transportation, respondents were asked to complete a second survey by Texas Transportation Institute (TTI) designed to collect more detailed information regarding transportation resources and specific coordination strategies.<sup>1</sup> The invitation to complete the TTI survey was sent to 35 agencies, of which 11 responded (33% response rate).

Phone interviews were attempted with each of the region's 24 county judge's offices and ten city manager's offices. Fourteen interviews were completed with county judges' offices and five interviews with city managers' offices. The interviews served to inform and educate officials about the regional planning process, solicit feedback about transportation needs, and address a gap in response from the municipal and county officials to the Panhandle Transportation Needs Survey. See Appendix F: County Official Survey.

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<sup>1</sup> TTI is a transportation research center organized under the Texas A&M University. TxDOT contracted with TTI to provide technical support to the statewide transportation coordination study effort.

### Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process

Follow-up phone calls were made to 122 agencies to explain the study and encourage response to the Panhandle Transportation Coordination Survey. The results of these attempts ranged from no response (messages left and calls not returned or repeatedly told to call back later) to more insightful (brief discussions of transportation issues faced by human and social service). More in-depth phone interviews were conducted with key agencies whose contact person was unavailable for a face-to-face meeting. Lastly, twenty on-site visits were made. See Table 3.2: Agency Contact List – Phone Interviews; and Table 3.3 Agency Contact List – On-Site Visit.

*Table 3.2: Agency Contact List – Phone Interviews*

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Department of Aging and Disability	Desha Henderson, Program Administrator
Northwest Texas Healthcare System	Mark Miracle, Director of Mobile Mom Program
American Red Cross, Panhandle	Vicky Richmond, Executive Director
Pampa Regional Medical Center	Terry Barnes, Marketing Director
Amarillo City College	Adult Students Program Director
Goodwill Industries	Mary Smith and Rory Brown, Executive Director
Experience Works	Mary Parker, Director
Coalition of Health Care Services	Dorinda Bates, Director
Don & Sybil Harrington Center	Jim Wade, Director

*Table 3.3: Agency Contact List – On-Site Visit*

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Contact</b>
Jan Werner Adult Day Care	Jim Chilcote, Director Transportation
Panhandle Rural Transit	Gerald Payton, Director Transportation
Amarillo City Transit	Judy Phelps, Director
Amarillo Health & Humans Services Division	Cindy Vandiver,
Texas Workforce Commission	Johnny Smith, Program Specialist
Baptist Saint Anthony Hospital	Laura Rehyer, Patient Relations
Amarillo Area Agency on Aging	David Green, Executive Director,
American Cancer Society: Road to Recovery	Terri Prescott, Program Director
Amarillo High Plains Dialysis Center	Rebecca Carr,
Texas Panhandle Mental Health Mental Retardation ASC Industries	Eloise Hanes, Executive Director
Department of Rehabilitative Services	Jim Haile, Area Manager
Baptist Community Services	Tom Ewing, Transportation Supervisor
Dumas Nursing & Rehabilitation Center	Laurel English, Administrator
Hereford Senior Citizen Center	Jackie McNeese, Executive Director
Kings Manor	Stella Delgado, Director Transportation
Craig Methodist	Cindy Long, Director Environ Services
Amarillo Senior Citizen Center	Judi Solley, Executive Director
Panhandle Community Service - Dalhart	Billie Harruf, Center Coordinator
Panhandle Community Services – Dumas	Caroline Hawkins, Center Coordinator
Panhandle Community Services – Hereford	Celia Serrano, Center Coordinator

### **Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process**

Beginning in June, attempts to contact American Medical Response (AMR) were made through phone and email. AMR is the new prime contractor for Medicaid services for Region 1 (the Panhandle region) as of June 2006. As such, they are one of the largest providers of demand-response transportation. AMR has been in contact with the RTAG beginning August 2006 and one of their sub-contractors, LaFleur, has attended workshops and RTAG meetings. The RTAG recognizes the importance of AMR's support to future coordination efforts and will continue to encourage AMR's participation in appropriate planning activities.

#### **Public Meetings**

Ten public meetings were held in the Panhandle region from June 1 to June 27 to solicit input regarding transit needs and barriers to coordination. Meeting locations were chosen based on population and geographical diversity. To encourage attendance, meeting announcements were sent to all agency contacts and a notice of a public hearing was sent to regional newspapers. Attendance at meetings ranged from one attendant (Perryton) to 22 attendants (Childress). See Table 3.4: Panhandle Public Meeting Schedule.

*Table 3.4: Panhandle Public Meeting Schedule*

<b>Date</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>Name of Meeting Facility</b>	<b>Address of Facility</b>
Thursday, June 1			
12:00 noon	Amarillo	Room 306, City Hall	509 SE Seventh St
Tuesday, June 20			
5:00 PM	Dalhart	Dalhart Senior Citizens Building	610 Denrock
7:30 PM	Dumas	Moore County Community Building	16th and Maddox
Wednesday, June 21			
5:00 PM	Hereford	Hereford Community Center	100 Avenue C
7:30 PM	Tulia	Swisher County Memorial Building	126 S.W. Second St.
Thursday, June 22			
7:00 PM	Childress	Childress Auditorium - Reunion Rm	1000 N. Commerce
Monday, June 26			
12:00 PM	Pampa	Chamber of Commerce	200 N. Ballard
5:00 PM	Miami	Roberts County Community Center	103 Main St.
7:30 PM	Perryton	Frank Phillips College, Allen Campus Conference Center	2314 S. Jefferson
Tuesday, June 27			
7:00 PM	Amarillo	PRPC - Board Room	415 W. 8th Avenue

**Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process**

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The format of the meeting included a short presentation explaining transit coordination followed by a facilitated discussion regarding transit needs and barriers. Materials accompanying the meeting included hand-outs of the presentation and three posters providing study information to-date – a county-by-county assessment of transit-related demographic information, a general overview of the levels of transit coordination, and initial findings from Panhandle Transit Survey. See Appendix G: Public Meeting Summary.

**Workshops**

After the findings from the outreach and surveys were reached, workshops were organized to focus on specific strategies and constituencies. See Table 3.5: Panhandle Workshop Schedule.

*Table 3.5: Panhandle Workshop Schedule*

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>
Elderly & Disabled Transportation	Amarillo, Texas	August 31
Job Access Strategies	Childress, Texas	September 7
Amarillo City Transit – Flex Routing	Amarillo, Texas	October 18
Travel Training – PILC	Amarillo, Texas	October 18
Job Access Strategies – Bus Pool	Childress, Texas	October 18
Independent Transportation Network	Amarillo, Texas	October 11 (Item discussed at the SAC meeting)
Job Access Strategies	Hereford, Texas	Numerous meetings organized by Panhandle Transit with stakeholders from September to October

The work plan and public input process worked satisfactorily; however improvements could be made to future efforts, including the following two:

- Identifying RTAG committee members to serve as liaisons between the planning team members and specific constituencies. In this process, the outreach that was conducted by RTAG members to their respective communities was, at times, limited. One reason for this was the lack of direction by the consultant team to committee members about how they could increase the effectiveness of their time and input.

### ***Chapter 3: Coordinated Service Planning Process***

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- Earlier attention to specific solutions for the region. Because this was an initial attempt to create a cohesive coordinated plan for the whole region, about one-third of the time was spent learning about providers and educating them about coordinated transportation. This emphasis created a time-crunch when it came to getting down to the details of the specific action plans/pilot projects. For future iterations, forming working groups early on in the process to address specific strategies and constituencies earlier may create a greater level of involvement and generate better crafted plans.